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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000813

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SUBJECT: CANDIDATES LINING UP FOR MADAGASCAR'S ELECTIONS

REF: A) ANTANANARIVO 749

- B) ANTANANARIVO 721
- C) ANTANANARIVO 434
- D) 06 ANTANANARIVO 1186

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1. (SBU) SUMMARY: With August 14 ending of the open season to declare candidacy in upcoming legislative elections (REF A), political parties are forming coalitions and preparing their hopefuls. President Ravalomanana's TIM party is actively selecting candidates throughout the 119 districts. To combat TIM's political heavyweights, such as the former Prime Minister, the opposition platform is hoping to unite behind consensus candidates and counting on lack of discipline within TIM to help them win seats in at least 30 percent of the districts. The President seems confident this election will be a "cakewalk," but political observers wonder whether he is miscalculating by alienating members of his own party, taking party discipline for granted and choosing to go it alone politically. END SUMMARY.

TIM Goes It Alone  
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2. (U) At President Ravalomanana's behest, the TIM Political Bureau has been hard at work whittling down the candidate nomination lists drafted by each of the 22 appointed regional chiefs working alongside a Government of Madagascar (GOM) Minister-"coach." The lists will be passed to President Ravalomanana for final approval. Some TIM deputies from the recently dissolved National Assembly hoping to run for reelection are nervous about this new selection process, as they are not even aware if they made it onto the list. However, TIM has made it known they will launch a number of political heavyweights, including Former Prime Minister Jacques Sylla (likely to become President of the National Assembly if he wins); the President of TIM; the President of the Malagasy Olympic Committee; and the Ministers of Energy, Finance and Budget, Mines, Environment, Health, and Decentralization. As Ministers can not concurrently serve in the National Assembly but can give their seat to the next TIM representative on the district list, their candidacy may be a tactic to gain seats for less popular TIM members.

3. (U) In a marked departure indicating the President's level of confidence, TIM will not be forming coalitions to bolster its standing. A number of small parties who supported Ravalomanana during the referendum, such as AME and GRAD ILOAFO, will separately present their own candidates in a handful of districts. Even internal TIM dissidents, members of the so-called CRT wing (REF B), failed to make the cut. Ostracized from the party, CRT will launch

its own candidates.

#### The Opposition

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¶4. (U) With TIM expected to win comfortably in Antananarivo, the opposition is angling to win seats in the provinces. The recently created opposition platform, including Leader Fanilo of former presidential candidate Herizo Razafimahaleo and PSDUM of former presidential candidate Jean Lahiniriko (REF D), had hoped to jointly present one candidate in 50 percent of the districts. With opposition efforts suffering from leadership problems and in-fighting, Razafimahaleo says 30 percent is more realistic. The former ruling party AREMA remains split; Pierrot Rajaonarivelo's wing is preparing to go solo in case the opposition platform fails.

¶5. (U) President Ravalomanana recently reached out to opposition leaders in the traditional opposition stronghold of Tamatave, promising he would carry out development projects there if they agreed to collaborate. Some media reports suggest he also offered the possibility of accelerating the embezzlement trial of former Mayor Roland Ratsiraka (REF C). The President's efforts at rapprochement were rejected by most opposition leaders in the area as an effort to divide them. Upset no such meeting was held in Antananarivo, opposition members in other parts of the country dismissed his efforts as a political move to gain traction in Tamatave in the upcoming elections.

¶6. (SBU) The list of those who will not be running continues to grow. The sole female candidate in the December 2006 elections, Elia Ravelomananatsoa, announced she will not participate to protest the hasty date and the GOM's lack of electoral code reform. Several smaller parties are abstaining for similar reasons. The FJKM church, of which Ravalomanana is Vice-President, has announced it will not endorse the candidacy of any of its pastors to avoid losing the respect of parishioners, although some think it has more to do with pastors being at odds with the President's agenda.

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¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: The National Electoral Commission has invited national and international observers and guaranteed that public air time will be equally shared among candidates. Still, the GOM's continued resistance to implement electoral reforms -- as well as the President's mandate for political appointees to get involved in the TIM party structure for these elections - cast some doubt on the President's credibility. Unconfirmed media reports in recent weeks spoke of regional chiefs either promising local leaders rewards or threatening dismissal if the desired TIM candidate is not elected in their areas.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT CONTINUED: President Ravalomanana seems confident this election will be a "cakewalk," but political observers wonder whether he is miscalculating by alienating members of his own party and choosing to go it alone politically. There is no guarantee the TIM hopefuls in each district whose names are not on the President's final list of candidates will not run as independents. Leaders of the opposition platform, while already raising the specter of fraud, are clearly hoping such lack of discipline within TIM will play in their favor come election day. END COMMENT.

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